577 an uncomfortable situation among his own family; but under-
626 neath this surface, the evil shows through. It is not unusual to
577 be faced with a disconcerting absence of moral sense, ferocious
157 egotism, deep-seated duplicity, impudent treachery and cold,
unperturbed cruelty (1). And one can see, perhaps in all of

1. The chronicle of Ségou, especially, attests this tradition of trickery and hypocrisy (see especially the tales about Ma-n-son, p. 93, and about Da, p. 101).

them, the scorn and even hatred felt for anyone who is unfortunate, weak, ill or abandoned. However, it should certainly be noted that there are also Bambara who display the most disinterested devotion, generous hospitality and remarkable courage; some even give evidence of that kind of inborn distinction which is to be found among even the most primitive peoples and which is the mark of superior people.

183 Thus, no code organizes Bambara rules of life. Everything depends upon custom, that mysterious thread, at once fragile and strong, which links the generations one with another [130] and which sustains the individual, though he is unaware of it, to such an extent that he is completely lost without it. Handed down by earlier generations, superstitiously preserved, it is imposed through fear of the punishment which will follow transgression. At first glance, custom appears to be an amalgam of the most heterogeneous elements and that is why we Europeans find it at once respectable and ridiculous, good and bad, useful and futile, sometimes atrocious and then again excellent. On closer study it is seen to exhibit, on the basis of feelings common to all humanity, an efflorescence peculiar to the native milieu, a natural morality which duplicates positive laws.

It is the nature of man to observe certain laws, to see the good and the bad in what surrounds him and, in his conduct, to display a leaning toward the good and an aversion to the bad. He recognizes within himself something which criticizes his actions from a similar point of view and, which, in fact, judges them.